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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001358

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, S/CT, INR/NESA  
NSC FOR E. MILLARD

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [CE](#) [NO](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: Tiger official, in high profile trip to the east, sticks to hard-line stance regarding base

Refs: Colombo 1344, and previous

(U) Classified by James F. Entwistle, Charge' d'Affaires.  
Reasons 1.5 (b, d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: S.P. Thamilmelvam, political chief of the Tamil Tigers, has reiterated that the group has no plans to vacate an unauthorized base it has set up in Trincomalee and, indeed, there has been no change in the situation on the ground. Thamilmelvam, who wrapped up a long visit to the east on August 4, appears to have used the trip to rally support from the important eastern Tiger faction on peace process matters. His trip, which is virtually unprecedented for a high-level Tiger official, highlights his increasingly prominent role in the organization. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) TIGERS STICK TO HARD-LINE: S.P. Thamilmelvam, political chief of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) organization and a close associate of LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran, has reiterated that the group has no plans to vacate an unauthorized base it has set up in Trincomalee District. In comments posted on the pro-LTTE website "TamilNet" on August 1 and reported in the Sri Lankan press, Thamilmelvam was quoted as stating that the base was located well within a long-standing LTTE area of influence. He added that, in any case, the base had been there for many years and was not worth bothering about. These assertions contradict the findings of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, "SLMM," which has ruled that the base encroaches on government-controlled territory and was established only within the past year, thus violating the February 2002 ceasefire accord (See Reftels). Poloff contacted the SLMM's Trincomalee office, which confirmed that as of early August 4 LTTE forces still occupied the site.

3. (C) Norwegian Ambassador Hans Brattskar on August 4 confirmed to Charge' and SFRC staffer Jonah Blank the lack of progress on the base. He said the next step is a SLMM ultimatum to the LTTE. If the LTTE does not respond to that ultimatum, the issue would pass into Brattskar's "facilitator" channel. Brattskar noted that his only "weapon" in that event would be tough talk in Kilinochchi.

4. (C) VISIT TO THE EAST: Thamilmelvam made the comments regarding the base in the midst of a week-long visit to eastern Sri Lanka (he returned to the Wanni on August 4). Observers have commented that the trip is virtually unprecedented for a high-level Tiger official representing LTTE leader Prabhakaran and the Tigers' headquarters in the Wanni region in north-central Sri Lanka. Jehan Perera, the head of the National Peace Council, a local think-tank, told us that to his knowledge there has never been such a public trip by a high-level Tiger official to the east, though there were almost certainly numerous clandestine visits during the war years. Perera commented that based on what he had heard and read on TamilNet it seemed that Thamilmelvam was using the trip to brief the important eastern faction of the LTTE on the status of the peace process. (Note: The LTTE is believed to have two major factions: the most important one hails from Jaffna and includes much of the senior leadership, including Prabhakaran and Thamilmelvam; the other is from the east and supplies many recruits for the LTTE's military forces.) Perera went on to remark that the briefings probably focused on the LTTE's next steps in regard to the government's recent proposal outlining possible modalities for forming an interim administration in the north/east (see Reftels).

5. (C) With respect to the specifics of his visit to the east, Thamilmelvam held a slew of rallies, in addition to holding meetings with top LTTE officials in the region. According to press reporting, a sampling of Thamilmelvam's activities included:

-- On July 27, shortly after arriving in the region, Thamilmelvam spoke to a rally attended by thousands of LTTE supporters at Meenaham, a LTTE military base

located approximately 40 kilometers northwest of Batticaloa town. (Note: Meenaham is believed to be one of the Tigers' major bases in the jungle areas of Batticaloa.)

-- On July 27-28, Thamilchelvam held meetings with the LTTE's eastern commander "Karuna" and other local LTTE commanders. (Note: There are no reports indicating that Thamilchelvam met with "Karikalan," who used to be considered a senior LTTE official in Batticaloa, but seems to have been sidelined by the LTTE leadership in recent months.)

-- On July 29, Thamilchelvam and Karuna held a joint meeting with local NGO's working in the Batticaloa area.

-- On August 1, Thamilchelvam traveled to Trincomalee District where he met with LTTE district commander "Colonel Pathuman" and district political chief "Thilak." The meeting took place in Sampur, a LTTE-controlled coastal area located northeast of Mutur town and southeast of Trincomalee city. (Note: Norwegian Ambassador Brattskar confirmed that Thamilchelvam apparently did not visit the controversial military base set up near Trincomalee city mentioned above.)

-- On August 2, Thamilchelvam participated in the ceremonial opening of a computer training center established by the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization (TRO), a LTTE-controlled NGO, in the Mutur area. Later that day, Thamilchelvam addressed a large gathering of Trincomalee government officials.

-- On August 4 (or thereabouts), Thamilchelvam was slated to return via helicopter to LTTE headquarters in the Wanni region.

(Note: In his comings and goings in the east, Thamilchelvam has been taken around by a GSL helicopter. This has proven controversial, with some strongly anti-LTTE elements in the south complaining that the Tigers do not warrant such treatment.)

16. (C) COMMENT: Thamilchelvam's remarks on the base in Trincomalee indicate that there has been no change in the group's hard-line stance so far, despite some hopes that the LTTE might be reconsidering its position. After being very public in its complaints about the LTTE over the issue for a couple of weeks, the SLMM has been more low-key of late, perhaps hoping that quiet diplomacy might lead to a breakthrough.

17. (C) COMMENT (Continued): Thamilchelvam's trip highlights his increasingly prominent role in the LTTE organization. In fact, on political issues, Thamilchelvam seems almost as important within LTTE leadership ranks at this time as the seriously ill Anton Balasingham, the group's longtime spokesman and chief negotiator. END COMMENT.

18. (U) Minimize considered.

ENTWISTLE